1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
FF52 Nupe FF52

In the houses of the higher as well as of lesser nobility I found
595 the practice of divorcing ageing wives and replacing them with more
565 attractive girls. The ex-wife, especially if she had borne children, would
586 be allowed to stay on in the house and would continue to be supported by the husband, or ex-husband—a wife on pension, as it were. The late *Etsu* of Agaie was partial to a different method: he used to marry off his 'pensioned' wives, at very low bride-price, to *talakaži* and peasants, who were either glad to find a 'cheap' wife or else afraid to refuse so exalted a gift. Among the upper classes of Bida old men, long past marrying
832 age, would still add young girls to the number of their 'wives'. Aphrodisiacs (which one can buy from the barber-doctors in Bida) and stimulants (above all, kola-nuts) keep alive their sexual appetite. Old S., who died in 1935, 70 years old, had married a new young wife only the previous year, and a son was born to him ('to him' at least in the legal sense) posthumously.

595 This classbound polygamy deeply affects the sex morality of the
837 women and, indirectly, of the society at large. Respect for chastity and the sanctity of matrimonial ties dominates the traditional moral concepts of Nupe. But this 'double morality' of a social system which
831 legitimizes unrestricted sexual desire of the men in one privileged stratum, but would force similar desires in other strata into the realm of illegitimate and indictable action, is in danger of defeating itself. In Bida it has clearly provided a strong stimulus to extra-marital sex relations in all classes. Moreover, the starved sexuality of the women in the large polygamous households strives to find an outlet.[1] The insecurity of their legal position tends to remove the barriers of conventional matrimonial morality. Thus many of the younger wives or concubines seek satisfaction in illegitimate relationships and even semi-professional prostitution.

548 Adultery, including adultery in this extreme form of semi-profes-
837 sional prostitution, is extremely widespread among women of every status. Prostitution in the strict sense (practised as a profession and in brothels) does not occur in Bida. But we have heard that the kola-nut vendors on Bida night-market, all married women, are prostitutes at the same time.[2] We shall learn later of the close association between women's trade and prostitution (and the large majority of Bida women are traders of one kind or another). 'Every woman', an informant told me, 'whom you see beautifully dressed in the streets of Bida after dark, is a "bad" woman.' Informants, themselves married men, were all agreed that there were hardly any 'good' women left in Bida. But when I asked them what the husbands were doing about this they said: 'Nothing;
837 what could we do?' Indeed, they can do little but shut their eyes. The
586 obvious alternative, divorce, is impossible in most cases. Poor men
565 cannot afford to divorce their wives, for this would mean forfeiting part of the bride-price and thus their only chance of finding another wife; moreover, the economic dependence of many husbands on their wives (of which we shall hear more in a later chapter) forbids such a course.

838 [1] In the royal 'harems' homosexual practices—called *madigo* or *lutu* (the Arabic word for homosexuality)—are, in fact, said to occur.

[2] Their 'tariff' is commonly known: it varies between 6*d.* and 1*s.*

1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
FF52 Nupe FF52

Men who have to uphold their prestige and social position would never risk the publicity and ridicule of divorce proceedings in which they would have to appear in the role of the wronged husband.[1] The amorous affairs of Bida noblemen supply, in fact, an ever-welcome topic for the town gossips. When some years ago two popular noblemen quarrelled, everyone knew that it was about a girl and had the details at their fingertips. Only the men of very great wealth and highest status are in a position to restrain or threaten their unfaithful wives. For one thing, they can afford to forfeit more than one bride-price, and can thus divorce their wives (according to Nupe Mohammedan law) without invoking elaborate public proceedings. Besides, wives and paramours would hesitate to provoke the enmity of these powerful personages. It is not unnatural, then, that (as my informants said) the wives of these men supply the only example of unimpaired marital fidelity in Bida—another no less striking instance of 'double morality'.

If the older married men are either resigned or complacent, the younger men see in illegitimate adventures only an exciting and tempting aspect of Bida life. We shall meet later with their ideal, the dashing young man 'about town' who can 'have' all the women he wants and can boast of his conquests. The women who avails herself of the loosened marriage ties may be talked about and called (behind her back) a 'bad woman'—*nyizagi banza*, a 'worthless woman'. But in their ordinary behaviour towards these women, when meeting them in the street or in the house of a mutual friend, the men will never fail in their respect towards them or betray by a sign their moral prejudices. This ambiguous attitude is symptomatic of a society which, though still conscious of its traditional dogmatic appreciation of chastity, is yet adapting itself to a spreading laxity of morals.

There is indeed evidence to show that sexual licence has been greatly increasing in the last generation or two. But there is also evidence of the fact that sexual licence on a smaller scale and within strictly defined limits enjoyed a legitimate existence in traditional Nupe society. The anomaly of public morals which would condemn sexual licence yet at the same time sanction it in a certain well-defined social domain is familiar to the student of society. In Nupe as in all other societies this qualified admission of sexual licence is due to various social causes. A first cause lies in the nature of sex itself, namely, in the reaction to the restraint on all pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relations which characterizes the traditional sex morality of the people. Another cause is the large floating population in Bida, composed of traders, warriors (formerly), labourers (to-day), that is, men who come to Bida without their wives and depend on prostitution for the satisfaction of their sexual appetite. A third cause is embodied in the institution of female trade. We shall see later that women's trade involves a loosening of matrimonial and family ties and tends to become identified with licentious living. In female trade Nupe society thus has grasped a ready occupational framework for that domain of sanctioned

[1] Clear evidence of this is the scarcity of divorce cases, which form two-thirds of all court cases in Bida, from the houses of the nobility.

1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
FF52 Nupe FF52

sexual licence towards which the other social forces appear to be driving. The result is the close association between professional female trade and semi-professional licensed prostitution which we can observe to-day.

Yet admission into this 'domain' was in turn made dependent upon a certain qualification, namely childlessness. Here we can add a final, ideological motive to the social causes behind the moral development. It is embodied in the Nupe conception of barrenness as a state outside conventional morality, and its contribution is twofold: it helps to define more narrowly the group in which sexual licence shall be sanctioned, by making sterility of the women a criterion of admission; and it provides at the same time the spiritual framework for such social sanction, by linking it with certain religious or quasi-religious beliefs. To some extent the ideological association between barrenness and sexual licence can be reduced to certain obvious rational motives, which are, in fact, present in the minds of the people: childlessness is of great advantage in the life of the women traders whose profession involves constant travelling and long absence from home; moreover, the sexual indiscretions of sterile women are socially of less consequence than those of other women, being comparatively safe from discovery and precluding the more disturbing legal complications (i.e. birth of illegitimate children). But the social interpretation of barrenness also expresses certain more deeply rooted beliefs. To the Nupe marriage has no real meaning without progeny. Barrenness is regarded as a great curse and misfortune, and many cults and forms of magic are designed to secure fertility of the women or to cure barrenness. Traditional religious beliefs place barren women in a category apart and exclude them from participation in the most important annual cult of the country, the *gunnu*.[1] As the barren woman fails by the common standard of marriage and womanhood, she is also exempted from the standards of common morality. Adultery and unchastity count less in her than in other women. And although the stigma of immorality would still attach to the unchaste barren woman (she would still be called a 'worthless woman'), it would be, as it were, overshadowed by and fused with the other paramount stigma of barrenness itself.

The growth of sexual licence far beyond its traditionally sanctioned limits is again due to various causes, economic, political, and religious. The primary cause appears to be economic and will be discussed in that context. Its effectiveness, however, is greatly strengthened by the political and social factors which foster what I have termed the 'double morality' in Nupe society. We can also see that the Nupe conception of barrenness must itself indirectly aid these tendencies and defeat the limitations which it was meant to uphold. For in a country with spreading sterility and even birth restriction, a religion which withholds its sanctions of matrimonial morality in the case of childless women can prove but a weak bulwark against the tide of sexual licence. Mohammedanism in Nupe, committed as it is to that 'double morality', undermines rather than supplies forces of moral restraint.

[1] For a description of this aspect of barrenness see *J.R.A.I.* 1937, p. iii.

1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
FF52 Nupe FF52

A comparison between sex morality in the town and in the villages will bring the final proof of our interpretation of the social causes of moral laxity and publicly condoned sexual licence. For in the villages, where the political and economic factors to which we have attributed this development are much less conspicuous than in Bida, sexual licence in this sense is absent also. The same informants who declared that there were no 'good women' left in Bida maintained that the opposite was true of the country. Within limits, this is correct. Semi-professional prostitution is absent and adultery is far less frequent than in Bida. Above all, it is not glossed over for fear of publicity and ridicule: it leads to quarrels and frequently to divorce. Nor are illegitimate amorous adventures applauded and bandied about. The more closely knit village life renders sexual promiscuity both more difficult and more risky, and the danger of provoking serious conflicts forces it into the sphere of clandestine and disreputable activities. The ideal of the Bida Lothario is absent in the Nupe village.

It is largely true to say that among the peasant women also the Bida ideal of the glamorous 'fast' woman finds no following. Or, more correctly, it finds no following among the peasant's wives and daughters who have chosen village life. For especially in the larger trading-places there is a certain (increasing) minority of women who leave the village to join the army of 'loose' women traders. However, they do not introduce their ways into village life itself. To quote again from my informants: 'Peasant women are on the whole better wives than our women in Bida. You see it when you come to a village: you will not find women with whom you can sleep. But who would want to sleep with them? They are badly dressed, they do not wash, use no scent, and smell of sweat. There are a few exceptions, though, for example the women in the house of the chief of K.'—referring to a village in which the chief's family was in many ways emulating the standards of Bida life. There is good sense in these cynical (though not cynically meant) remarks. Hard work, lack of leisure, the inability to afford nice dresses or the help of cosmetics, make the peasant woman comparatively unattractive; she ages more quickly than her more fortunate sister in town. It is not surprising that she should come short of the sophisticated urban standards of taste. If the peasant woman thus succumbs less to temptation, it is also true that less temptation comes her way. Having chosen peasant life she can but choose peasant morality also. The different sexual morality in town and village is thus essentially an expression of differences in economic conditions and of inequality of wealth and status.

It is tempting to dwell on this relation between economic and political factors and the attitude of the society towards the problems of sex and morality. There has been the tendency in recent anthropological writings to regard the elaboration of the sex theme in different cultures, the temperamental and personality traits which, in a society, appear associated with sex, as the expression of some ultimate quality in culture itself —the genius or *ethos* of a culture. That women in one society are 'gentle' and 'aggressive' in another, that one culture regards them as masculine workers and another as feminine mothers or partners in love,